

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH.

A

S E R M O N,

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A P O L O G Y .

The Discourse which follows, was originally delivered in the regular course of pastoral labor, as one of a connected series, taken apart from which, and considered as a discussion of the subject presented by the text, it is a mere fragment, with neither beginning nor end.

It has, however, in the main, we hope, its own unity, and being requested, we submit it, with some revision, but without change of sentiment or argument, for the use of those who deemed its publication desirable.

S E R M O N .

ECCL. VII: 4.

“ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning ; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

IN estimating the propriety of scenes of amusement, in judging of the state of mind implied in fondness for such scenes, and not less in judging of their probable results, discrimination must be made in reference to age.

The author of our text had not in mind the sports and games of gleesome children merely, when he said, “ The heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”

This distinction is important in two aspects :

First, as respects the implication of undue and unworthy frivolty.

Childhood is the time for sports. Not pressed with life's heavier cares and duties, not, indeed, yet fitted for them, or capable of undertaking them, let children play. 'Tis fitting for them. It is what they need withal, as wholesome, and indeed as necessary for them, as it is innocent and fitting.— Let children play. Let, if you please, their very heart be in their mirth. Who, that is wise, will not look on with sympathizing gladness ?

Yet even in childhood, as this age advances, we wish to see more and more thought of serious things, and less and less of mere amusement ; more of books, and less of play ; even the child's heart waking up already to the great realities of spiritual being, and taking an earnest and a thoughtful hold on

preparation for life's serious duties; yes, and on preparation for the life to come.

As childhood ripens into youth we expect this, we demand it. And if we do not see it, if the heart be not by this time manifestly in the house of instruction, rather than in the house of mirth, we censure for unsuitable frivolty, and augur ill of the results.

Much more, then, when in mature life, in age now fitted for life's solemn duties, and in the midst of all those duties now come and hourly pressing; when at this age one is still found—in mature womanhood for instance—not merely retaining a youthful buoyancy and mirthfulness of spirit, sometimes overflowing, but with the very heart in scenes of mere amusement; intent on dress, on parties, and on dances, as the chief pleasures, nay, sometimes even, it would seem, as if they were the very business of one's life; this is uncomely, is unfitting to this age, is pitiable, merits (when one considers from what high and holy joys and duties the heart turns to these frivolties) both indignation and contempt.

This period of life demands another spirit, and another conduct; demands the giving of the heart to graver duties, and to more worthy pleasures.

This then is the first ground of discrimination between the amusements of a riper age, and the mere sports of childhood.

A heart intent on mere amusement is not equally befitting these two periods of life.

Still more important, however, is this discrimination in a second aspect of it.

As these amusements of a riper age are not mere childhood's sports, as respects the appropriateness of a heart set on mere amusement to the period of life; so neither are they childhood's games, as respects the feelings with which they are entered into, and their true zest.

In estimating the propriety and the influence of any particular amusements, or scenes of amusement of this riper age, it is never to be forgotten, that they are not, and cannot be entered into merely with childhood's heart—that men and

women, that young men and women, are not drawn to places of amusement merely by childhood's love of sport, nor are exposed when there merely to childhood's dangers. The child plays at his child's game with a child's heart. Those votaries of the dance, upon the other hand, who throng the ball room—these are not children. Nor are they there with childhood's heart. Far from it. The riper passions of maturer years are there, imparting to these sports another zest than that of childhood's games, and giving them a widely different influence.

It is not even mere frivolty that reigns there; though that frivolty, indeed, both in its moral character, and in its tendencies, must be esteemed a very different thing from the mere mirthfulness of childhood. Passions deeper than mere frivolty are there, often the very soul and spirit of the scene. Hence we should fail entirely to do any justice to this subject, should we confine ourselves to that mere vanity and levity of mind, and that neglect of weightier matters, (grievous as even these evils are,) which an excessive fondness for the house of mirth implies, and which indulgence in its scenes so often fosters.

We can not even treat the subject with any truthfulness to nature and to fact, much less with any adequate exposure of the evils we would gladly check, except we take some notice of those under currents, deeper than mere frivolty, and often, indeed, bearing this but as mere froth upon their surface; those other and deeper feelings than mere childish love of exercise and fun, which bear the heart into the house of mirth, which so often give its scenes their chief attraction and true zest, and in connection with which lies their greatest danger.

We would not, indeed, by any means forget, that of those present at any scene of amusement, in any house of mirth, different individuals may have been led there by very different feelings; nor yet that the same scene may have a very different influence upon different minds.

This holds, indeed, of other than mere scenes of mirth.

Even to the house of God, for instance, one goes for purposes of piety and true devotion, another to see, or to be seen. So to a social evening party, one goes in the hope of enjoying sober and profitable conversation, and of cultivating friendly feeling and acquaintance.

Another is at the same place with a heart full of the merest vanities which mingle with the scene; displaying one's own dress and person, or gazing admiringly upon the dress of others, or on the furniture, and tables, and display of wealth and fashion; or—if possible, more frivolous still—gathering ever to the corner where mirth is loudest, and nonsense emptiest.

Another looks, not with admiration merely, but with covetousness, and bitter envying at heart, upon displays of wealth and fashion, and goes home repining, or else, it may be, with purposes of new display, determined not to be outdone.

For which last reason, by the way, whoever has a wife of such a temper, and resources not exhaustless, may well dread an invitation where there will be display; for many are the embarrassments and bankruptcies, and still more infinite, the envyings and repinings, and when not these, yet the excessive soul destroying worldliness begotten of such scenes.

Others, the mean while, attend these social parties with quite another class of feeling, led, if the simple truth were known, mainly by the expectation of meeting there, in free and social intercourse, young persons of the other sex, of seeing and being seen by them; a thing we do by no means name to censure, provided all be virtuous and pure.

But while it is thus freely admitted, that various motives may lead to the same place of resort; and that, moreover, different minds may be very differently affected by the same scene; it must also be admitted, that each has, however, in the main, its own peculiar attractiveness, and its own peculiar tendencies. It is so with the house of mourning. It is so with the house of mirth.

Now, doubtless, among the chief attractions, and not less among the most important tendencies of the ball room, are

those which pertain to it, as a free mingling of the sexes. Is then its influence in this direction altogether desirable and safe?

It is, indeed, undoubtedly to be conceded, that the free meeting of the sexes, if simply, for a rational and sober conversation, and properly conducted, tends strongly, on the whole, not to wantonness, but rather to true purity and chastity of mind, and to mutual elevation and refinement.

Of course, having admitted this, we shall be far from censuring such gatherings, when properly conducted, not even though some gross minds may pervert even these.

But whether *all* promiscuous meetings of the sexes are of this tendency, is quite another question.

Whether promiscuous dancing be of this tendency—whether, especially, the ball room be of this tendency—we more than doubt. Gatherings for this purpose, are a very different thing from the promiscuous meeting of the sexes for rational and sober conversation merely. And the especial charms, and the peculiar tendencies of the specific points of difference, are worthy of a serious consideration. And this the more, because, undoubtedly, the additional zest imparted to this species of amusement by the mutual presence of the sexes, is one great secret of its fascination, and a chief support of such assemblies.

Did the customs of society rigidly forbid all dancing of either sex in presence of the other, we suppose this species of amusement would not merely, thereby, become quite harmless, (a very safe “time” being thus found “to dance,”) but would even, presently, we fancy, quite disappear, robbed mainly thus of all peculiar fascination.

We do suppose, that not all the charms of music, of graceful and measured movement, and of wholesome and exhilarating exercise withal—that not all these charms combined, how great soever they may be, would keep this fascinating species of amusement from mainly dying out, at least in a community like this, and on the part of grown up people, but for the charm the mutual presence, participation, and beholding of the sexes gives it.

This, if true, does of itself imply an aptness of some sort, both to excite and to gratify the mutual interest of those whose mutual presence is, it would seem, so necessary to impart sufficient zest. And if so, then it is, at least, desirable that it be also fitted to awaken that interest in its best forms, to direct it to the worthiest objects, and to impart to it its purest and most elevated character. But is it so? For, to say nothing of contacts of person, sometimes somewhat free, what is it which is, in this way, mutually beheld? Is it the more solid qualities of mind and heart? or is it rather, and in this case peculiarly, charms more physical and sensuous, charms of person, of form, of movement, variously exhibited before the eye, and naturally fixing its regard—the whole scene and exercise, the mean while, being rather one of physical and sensuous excitement? Of this then, and in the respect to which we have referred, what is the tendency?

These points deserve a serious consideration. And so, in connection with them, does the fact, that the dance, originally, no doubt, simple and pure, as to the emotions out of which it sprang, and even often truly sacred in its uses, seems early to have been discovered to possess an aptness to a very different use; and has, accordingly, in every wanton age and country, been actually used for the worst purposes: used both for the gratifying and for the excitement of the mutual interest of the sexes, in its very lowest forms—made at once a pander and a provocative to sensual desire. It was so anciently, in the sacred rites of Venus, of Ceres, and of Bacchus; so in the ancient theatre; and so in their private feasts and revels,—the prostitutes of Venus' temples being, on such occasions, the professional performers. It is so, at this day, in scenes of Eastern voluptuousness; in the all night dances of an impure heathenism, (in India, in Africa, and in the Islands of the Sea, for instance;) and not less truly, and not so much less grossly, as, for the honor of this age, it could be wished, in the Ellslerism, and kindred exhibitions of the modern theatre. Nor is it a mistake they make in this. Under those forms, at least, in which it has been thus made use of, the means,

none will deny, is fitted to the end. And is it then quite certain, that gross forms, and self-exhibitions, intentionally wanton, are necessary, in order to, at least, a measure of this fitness? Do not such uses throw some just suspicion on the inherent aptitudes and tendencies, even in its better forms, of what has been so used?

Is it, indeed, quite certain, that nothing more refined, perhaps, but lying in the same direction,—that nothing, if mitigated in degree, yet of the same essential nature, mingles at once in the attractiveness, and in the natural influences of the ball room among us?

The attractions of dress, never more studied than for such occasions,—the voluptuousness of music, combined with the voluptuousness of movement,—the varying exhibitions of the form and person, aiding and soliciting a lawless fancy,—contacts of person,—the protracting of all these into the late night hours,—to say nothing of stimulating drinks and viands sometimes used,—do not these things together render the ball room better fitted, at least, than any other mingling of the sexes allowed in good society, to awaken whatever of susceptibility in this respect each several mind may have?—And do they not also render it, indeed, in just this view, a scene of rare attraction for a certain class of minds? And is it always *safe* for other minds? Will those that go pure always so return? Are not there often the first kindlings of unchaste desire; the first steps taken in that “way to hell, going down to the chambers of death?” Is it not there, often, that the seducer first singles out his victim, fixing his lustful eye upon her, as she treads the voluptuous mazes of the dance? Does not weak woman there, sometimes, conscious of beauty, vainly display it to her own undoing;—little dreaming that that self-same weakness of her heart, which leads to the display, makes that display, even to herself unsafe? And is it not, moreover, possible at least, that there too, even the pure, and themselves above all such temptation, kindle, or fan, unconsciously, desires they would abhor to kindle, yet which will never rest till they have found

some victim? And if the polished and practiced voluptuary be there, (and do such particularly shun such scenes?) are the aptitudes, and tendencies, and freedoms of the scene never such as to afford him at once opportunity and advantage, not merely for present gratification, but for the furtherance of ill designs.

Is it, I say, quite certain, that even the scenes of the ball room have no such attractiveness as this for any minds,—no tendencies of this sort,—never such results? If some minds are quite above all this, are *all* minds quite above it? Or, if it be contended that the dance has no such aptitude or tendency as this, then let it be explained just on what principle it is, that the licentious have, in every age, so used it.

We shall not, of course, be understood as intimating that the dance is always engaged in, or witnessed from such motives, or always productive of such results. We are very far from believing either the one or the other. But that it has an inherent fitness for such uses, and a tendency to such results, capable of being very greatly varied in degree by the mode and circumstances of the exercise, but never wholly wanting;—that it is moreover too often so used, and that it is too often effective to such results, even on minds most innocent of such intent in going;—and yet farther, that neither this fitness and this tendency, (and does not truth require that we should add, nor yet these uses and results?) are found in their *most* mitigated measure in the all night dances of the ball room;—these things, we think, are undeniable.*

But by no means are these gross results the only sad and unhappy results, arising from the fitness of the dance to awaken the susceptibilities of youth. Indeed, were there no danger whatsoever of results positively vicious, there are still

* Hear Burton: “Yet were it so that these of which I have hitherto spoken, and such like enticing baits, be not sufficient, there be many others which will of themselves intend this passion of burning lust; amongst which dancing is none of the least, and it is an engine of such force that I may not omit it. *Incitamentum libidinis* Petrarch calls it, &c.” And after quoting instances of its effectiveness to such results, he adds, “Who can not parallel these stories out of his experience?” Anat. Melan. Part 3, sec. 2.

tendencies deserving the most serious consideration. The mutual attachment of the sexes, occurring at a proper time, and being what it should be, both in itself and in its choice of the object of attachment, is far from being either wrong or undesirable. But it is by no means matter of indifference at what age, or by what means, and in what circumstances, the susceptibilities of youth in this respect shall be awakened, and such attachments formed. Now a moment's reflection, we think, will make it obvious that the tendency of such gatherings of young persons as we now refer to is, decidedly, both to the awakening of these susceptibilities, and the formation of these attachments; and also to the formation of these attachments upon, at least, inferior principles and grounds.

They tend to premature attachments, if the too young frequent them. Not unfrequently, even in the dancing school, this tendency is made but too apparent, in the precocious development of feelings it were better should yet slumber:—and in the ball room, also, doubtless, commence many premature attachments, and much fruitless and injurious awakening of the susceptibilities of youth in this respect, sadly disturbing, often, the processes of intellectual discipline and moral culture.

But what we wish especially to say is, that these assemblies tend to the formation of attachments upon, to say the least, inferior principles,—attachments not formed upon the highest and best grounds of such attachments, and naturally ending in unhappiness;—the ball room in this respect contrasting strongly with those social gatherings where conversation is the entertainment. And that because the whole scene of the ball room is fitted to bring out charms of person rather than charms of mind,—is fitted to concentrate the attention mainly upon charms of person, form and movement;—the whole spirit of the surrounding scene, the meanwhile, being fitted to render the mind, at least for the time being, peculiarly susceptible to such attractions.

In these respects does not the ball room contrast strongly with the simple social party, where, much more prominently, in comparison at least, come out the charms of mind, reveal-

ed in conversation, and in the soul-betraying utterance of the face;—and where, in ordinary circumstances certainly, the tendencies, otherwise, of the surrounding scene, are much less sensuous? We can not much blame one, therefore, whose charms are rather of person than of mind, if she do seek out the ball room as her proper field of conquest; it being for her interest, perhaps, to go where every thing conspires to fix attention on the body, and divert it from the mind.

A little reflection on this matter, and no one, we think, can doubt which of the two scenes is the safer for the susceptible mind of youth; or from which are likely to result the most wholesome and well advised attachments.

Indeed, whoever sends a son to such assemblies as have been referred to, should not be greatly disappointed if he find him presently involved in an attachment, grounded in no discovery of high qualities of mind or heart, but awakened rather by the contemplation of a graceful, perhaps of a voluptuous form and movement, aided perhaps by charms of dress; attractions which the dance is so well fitted to render prominent and make effective, and to which he was rendered, perhaps; for the time being, much more than commonly susceptible by all the sensuous appliances and tendencies of the surrounding scene.

And whoever in like manner to such assemblies sends a daughter, comely in form and movement, should not be greatly surprised to find her presently attended by a suitor such as such charms alone might naturally win, or yielding her own affections up to one whose graceful movement, and polished manner, much more than any exhibition of high qualities of mind or heart, have won this place in her regard.

Before one patronizes, then, this species of amusement, especially the ball room and the all night dance; or sends his children to them, or fits his children for them, let it be well considered in this aspect of it, viz: as a thing, whose own inherent aptness to such uses, has caused it to be in every age abundantly made use of, both anciently and now, at once for the gratifying of a sensual mind, and for the awakening of

sensual desire ; but at any rate as fitted to awaken the mutual interest of the sexes, but not in its best forms, or on its highest grounds ; and as tending to all manner of results in this direction, from mutual attachments exceptionable only as not formed upon the highest grounds, and from premature and inconsiderate attachments, and fruitless and injurious awakening of the susceptibilities of the young, in this respect, down to the lowest forms of vice.

This then, this susceptibility of mutual attachment of the sexes, is one under current of more serious passion, strongly distinguishing, in many instances at least, amusements of a riper age from the mere gleesome sports of childhood ; an under current full often leaving the seeming votary of pleasure no longer chargeable with mere frivolty ; an under current bearing full often all this mirthfulness as a mere bubble on its surface ; and full often, too, not finding even these mirthful ones themselves too heavy to be borne off upon its current ;—whirled round and round in all its eddies ;—dashed often on its sunken rocks ;—or cast up at last upon the shore, in shame and sorrowful repentance.

Nor is this, by any means, the only under current of more serious passion, often distinguishing the mirthful scenes of riper years, from the mere gleesome games of childhood, and to be taken into the account, if one would rightly understand, either wherein consists their fascination, or what will be their probable result.

Mere personal vanity, quite willing to improve the opportunity the house of mirth affords for the display of a fine dress, and a fair face, and comely person, although without a thought or wish for the awakening of any deeper passion than mere admiration, this with some may be one secret impulse.

Often the pride of wealth and fashion takes these occasions to display itself ; and is there present, not for the mirth, but far more for the display ;—and thus this pride is nurtured ; and thus too, (as has been said already of like display at the mere social party,) is kindled often in other minds a taste for

vain display, a disposition to extravagance in dress, and style of living, that foolish and weak rivalry in these things, which leads to many bankruptcies and ruins; and when not thus, yet to a miserable raging thirst for wealth and slavery to mammon; perchance also to heart burnings, jealousies, and envyings for such causes, and bitter murmurings at one's own poverty; together, making up a ceaseless torment and inward wretchedness of minds, receiving thus within themselves that recompense of their error which is meet, for that they do not (for all this misery a sovereign cure,) set their hearts rightly upon higher good.

These have we given as instances and illustrations merely, of those under currents more serious than mere childish love of mirth and exercise, which often bear votaries of pleasure to the house of mirth, and give its scenes their zest;—under currents of which often more than one sets at the same moment to the same resort;—desires and secret springs of action of which the particular amusement proposed to be engaged in, is not unfrequently the mere pretence for taking opportunity, the mere disguise which covers up the true dangers of the scene;—under currents which, when they do not lead one to the house of mirth, may yet seize upon the mind when there, and so constitute a danger where they have not been a motive;—under currents, therefore, which must be distinctly apprehended and well considered; and of which, and not of the mere bubbles which they bear upon their surface, it must be asked “what harm?” before the influence of the scenes in which they mingle can be rightly apprehended.

Of these under currents, I have only farther to remark, not confining this remark, however, to *under* currents merely, that of all the various dispositions of the mind, which, in view of all its various attractions, lead the heart into the house of mirth, there is not one which is in any special harmony with piety toward God, or with intentness on those great ends of living which belong to man as an immortal being.

This last is a point worthy of particular consideration.—

For it is not on the ground simply of their being supported by, or of their tendencies to foster this or that particular evil passion, that the ball room, and scenes of the same spirit, are open to objection.

However it may be accounted for, it is undeniably true in fact, that the scenes and spirit of the house of mirth, and the spirit of devoted piety, are not in harmony.

Of this men seem to have an inward consciousness, even when they cannot themselves well explain its ground.

Thus, often, the very man who asks, and that perhaps in all sincerity of mind, "Where is the harm? what is the inconsistency between these things and piety?" and can not give an answer, which to himself seems adequate, even he seems usually more or less distinctly conscious that somehow *so it is*. Hence, if a true christian, he finds himself ill at ease in such indulgencies; and if a man of the world, he wonders when he sees professing christians joining in such scenes, and chuckles over it, or is sad at it, according as he stands affected toward the church, and toward true spiritual piety; it being, by common consent, regarded as a triumph of the world over the church, whenever one professing to be truly pious, according to the common acceptation of that term among evangelical christians, at least, is found participating in such scenes. Men are, in fine, somehow inwardly conscious that the two things are not in harmony, even when unable to explain just why they are not.

What is thus inwardly revealed in the consciousness of men, is also undeniably apparent to common observation. It is seen, in the first place, in the fact that the heart of the devoted christian is not in such scenes. However one may account for the fact, or however one may decide the question, whether to this rule there be not here and there a rare exception, its correctness, as a general rule can not be questioned.

And if it be true, on the one hand, that the supporters of the prayer meeting have, as a general rule, little sympathy with the ball room, it is equally true upon the other, that the

supporters of the ball room, have, as a general rule, as little sympathy with the prayer meeting.

The same want of harmony is seen also in the fact, that the scenes of the ball room are never fostered by revivals of religion, except, indeed, as the enemies of a revival do often get up a ball on purpose to counteract the prevailing spirit of religious inquiry ;--these men thus sufficiently betraying what is their judgment of the harmony between such scenes and vital godliness. Nor do they misjudge in this ; for if it be true that revivals do not foster the scenes of the ball room, it is equally true, that the scenes of the ball room do not cherish, in the minds of such as indulge in them, the spirit of religious inquiry.

In fine, however it may be explained, or however incapable it may be of any explanation, it is a fact of observation, known and read, and in the main owned of all men, that a fondness for such scenes, or much indulgence in them, and a true devoted piety, or even a spirit of religious inquiry, do not flourish side by side in the same heart. A strong hold of either soon excludes the other. There is not only mutual distaste, but there is strong and effectual counteraction. Deep religious feeling soon takes the heart out of the house of mirth, or else the scenes of the ball room, loved and persisted in, soon dissipate all deep religious feeling. These things, I say, however they may be explained, are settled and perfectly well known phenomena of mind.

These things, then, being obviously so, shall one allow himself, or shall one suffer his children to be borne off from piety ? or shall one in any way countenance that which so obviously bears others off from piety, simply because he cannot see the *reason* of what, however, obviously *is*.

But truly one would think the reason need not be so much in doubt.

For, as respects mere frivolty, and a heart intent on mere amusements, and on worldly and sensuous pleasures, let one reflect a moment on the great realities of our spiritual being, on the great fact of human sinfulness, and generally on the

momentous truths of our holy religion, and on the high, holy, infinite ends of living, which christianity sets before us, and which it belongs to the essential nature of true piety to make its own ends, and to be intent upon; let him consider, moreover, the nature, both of the peculiar joys, and of the peculiar sorrows of a devoted piety, and then let him say what harmony there can be between an earnest faith in these great truths,—between a soul agitated with these sorrows and these joys,—between a mind intent upon these great realities and ends of living,—and a heart in the house of mirth. Is it indeed inexplicable, that intentness of the soul on such realities should be exclusive of intentness on mere worldly pleasures and amusements?

And as respects under currents, deeper than mere frivolity,—desires and passions deeper than mere love of exercise and sport, let one reflect how much of “the lust of the flesh,” and of “the lust of the eye,” and of “the pride of life” are wont to be there—things “not of the Father but of the world,”—things which it is the christian’s daily struggle to keep under, yet which these scenes so often and so strongly tend to foster, and can he any longer need an explanation even, of the so well established fact that these scenes are not in harmony with piety?

But why speak of under currents merely, or why so carefully distinguish between the disguised and the undisguised attractions of the house of mirth; or between the deeper passions and the mere frivolity? In one essential feature the unavowed and the avowed attractions of these scenes, the passions deeper than mere frivolity and the frivolity itself, the most exceptionable and the least exceptionable fondness for the house of mirth, are all essentially alike. *They are all sensuous.*

To put the whole thing, then, at once upon broad principles, inclusive of the whole, let one consider, first, the essential difference between a sensuous mind and a spiritual mind; that is between a mind absorbed in the pleasures and pursuits which belong to our earthly and sensuous nature, on the one

hand, and a mind intent on those pleasures and those ends of living which belong to us as spiritual and immortal beings, on the other ;—let him then consider that an excessive, all-absorbing sensuousness and earthliness, are, as it were, the great disease of our degenerate humanity, against which the gospel of Christ perpetually struggles in the world, and against which faith contends, and the spirit of God perpetually wrestles in the soul of the believer :—

Then let him consider the scenes and pleasures, the prevailing spirit and tendencies of the house of mirth,—of the ball room, for instance, a scene in which, by virtue of their natural affiliations, all kinds of sensuous pleasure meet, and to which, therefore, all kinds of sensuous desire, from the least exceptionable to the grossest and most sensual, do naturally tend, but to which nothing spiritual tends, or is invited, where prayer and thoughts of death would be esteemed incongruous ; where, in fine, all at the best is sensuous and unspiritual, and tends to render the mind sensuous and unspiritual :—

And then let him yet farther consider, that of sensuous things, certainly of all but the most temperate indulgence in sensuous pleasures, the tendency is downward toward what is more and more exceptionably sensuous, in fine, toward downright sensuality ; sensuous things the mean while being so affiliated that one form of sensuous indulgence and excess naturally predisposes to another ;—and then let him consider the scenes and pleasures of the ball-room, for instance, all sensuous, at least, where not already sensual—all sensuous, the whole scene taken together, intensely sensuous, even in its beginnings, and therefore, if protracted, tending more and more toward what is positively sensual in the result ; and yet, as if to give ample time for this transition, all this protracted through the late night hours ; various excitants of our sensuous nature (of which the dance must be accounted one) the mean while aiding one another, and helping on these downward tendencies :—

Let one, I say, consider these things—let him view the

subject in the light of these broad facts and principles, and can he any longer doubt either whether it be true, or why it *must* be true, that such scenes are not in harmony with piety? Can he fail to see that, as respects good morals even, they are not and can not be an elevating and purifying element in social life? can he wonder if they often prove decidedly demoralizing even? Can he fail to see, in fine, abundant reasons why, while “the heart of fools is in the house of mirth,” the “heart of the wise” will be in other and more salutary scenes?

We object then to the scenes and pleasures of the house of mirth, partly that, beyond a wholesome and needed recreation, mere play is not the business of a man and a christian; and partly, and indeed much more, the fact sought to be partially brought out in this discourse, that all this is not mere play,—that these are not mere children,—and that those deeper and maturer passions than mere childhood’s love of exercise and sport, which mingle in these scenes, which give them tone and zest, and are indeed their chief support, and which these scenes, in turn, are so well fitted to excite and foster—that these maturer passions and conditions of the soul are not in harmony with piety, nor such as wisdom prompts to cherish.

Neither those currents of desire which bear the heart into the house of mirth, nor those most apt to seize on it when there, are such as bear the soul to God. Indeed they are not. They bear the soul from God—they bear a giddy multitude to endless ruin.

